

2

AM-MIDEAST-SOVIETS 6-15

BY RICHARD C. GROSS

WASHINGTON (UPI) --

MESSAGE TRAFFIC TO AND FROM THE SEVEN AIRBORNE DIVISIONS IN THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN ON THE INCREASE SINCE THE ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANON, U.S. INTELLIGENCE SOURCES SAID TUESDAY. THE SOURCES SAID THEY DO NOT KNOW THE CONTENTS OF THE MESSAGES AND CAUTIONED THAT THE INCREASE IN TRAFFIC DOES NOT MEAN ANY OF THE AIRBORNE TROOPS ARE PREPARING TO MOVE OUT. THEY SAID THERE HAVE BEEN NO INDICATIONS OF MOVEMENTS BY SOVIET TROOP TRANSPORTS.

THE SOURCES SAID A RISE IN MESSAGE TRAFFIC COULD BE A DECEPTION DESIGNED TO MAKE THE WEST THINK THE SOVIETS ARE ACTIVATING THEIR AIRBORNE DIVISIONS FOR MOVEMENT, POSSIBLY TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

BUT DISCLOSURE OF THE HEAVIER-THAN-USUAL MESSAGE TRAFFIC CAME WITHIN 24 HOURS AFTER THE SOVIET UNION DEMANDED ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON AND PLEDGED UNSPECIFIED HELP TO THE "ARAB CAUSE" IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

ALL SEVEN AIRBORNE DIVISIONS ARE BASED IN THE SOVIET UNION, SIX OF THEM IN THE WESTERN MILITARY DISTRICT AND ONE EAST OF THE URAL MOUNTAINS. THEIR TOTAL STRENGTH IS ESTIMATED AT 50,000 MEN. THE SOVIET UNION MOBILIZED ITS AIRBORNE TROOPS AT THE END OF THE 1973 OCTOBER WAR WHEN EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT CALLED ON THE KREMLIN TO ENFORCE A CEASE-FIRE THAT DID NOT STOP ISRAELI FORCES FROM ENCIRCLING THE EGYPTIAN THIRD ARMY IN SINAI, TRAPPING IT. IN RESPONSE, PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON CALLED A WORLDWIDE ALERT OF U.S. FORCES.

THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT MOVED ANY ADDITIONAL SHIPS INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA SINCE ISRAEL'S INVASION OF LEBANON. THEY HAVE 30 SHIPS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, 11 OF THEM WARSHIPS AND THE OTHERS SUPPORT VESSELS, PENTAGON SPOKESMAN HENRY CATTO SAID.

CATTO SAID MOSCOW HAS A "SURGE CAPABILITY" TO REINFORCE ITS FLEET FROM THE BLACK SEA, BUT NO REINFORCEMENTS HAVE BEEN DETECTED. PENTAGON AND STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID THAT, AS A

CONTINGENCY, THE SOVIETS ROUTINELY NOTIFY TURKEY DAILY OF THE POSSIBILITY THEY MAY SEND SHIPS THROUGH THE DARDANELLES STRAITS FROM THE BLACK SEA INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN.

THE UNITED STATES HAS ABOUT 30 SHIPS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, 22 OF THEM WARSHIPS, CATTO SAID. THEY INCLUDE THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER JOHN F. KENNEDY AND TWO OF ITS ESCORTS, WHICH ARE CRUISING 150 MILES OFF THE ISRAELI AND LEBANESE COASTS, STANDING BY TO EVACUATE AMERICANS FROM LEBANON.

OTHER U.S. INTELLIGENCE SOURCES SAID MILITARY ANALYSTS EXPECT THE SOVIETS TO REINFORCE THEIR MEDITERRANEAN FLEET BECAUSE ITS CURRENT STRENGTH IS BELOW NORMAL. THEY SAID THE ANALYSTS WERE SURPRISED THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT BOOSTED THEIR SHIP STRENGTH. "HISTORICALLY, IN TIMES OF CRISIS THEY USUALLY REINFORCE," ONE SOURCE SAID.

THE SOURCES REPORTED THAT IN THE AIR WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA, ISRAEL DOWNED 82 AIRCRAFT OF ALL TYPES, INCLUDING HELICOPTERS. BETWEEN 30 AND 40 OF THEM WERE SHOT DOWN BY U.S.-BUILT F-15S AND THE REMAINDER BY F-16S.

TWO F-15S AND SEVERAL F-4 PHANTOMS WERE DAMAGED BUT RETURNED SAFELY TO THEIR BASES IN ISRAEL, THE SOURCES SAID.

THEY SAID SYRIA HAD MOBILIZED ALL ITS FORCES, INCLUDING THE RECALL OF MIG-23 PILOTS IN LIBYA.

UPI 26-15-82 28:22 PED

THIS FORM FOR INTERNAL AGENCY USE ONLY
EDWORK SHEET
is work sheet contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Laws, Title 18, U.S.C. Sections 793, 794 and 795, the transmission or the revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.